

Hanford Openness Workshops *Fact Sheet*

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*The Hanford Openness
Workshops are a
collaborative effort
among the U.S.
Department of Energy-
Richland Operations
Office, the Consortium
for Risk Evaluation
with Stakeholder
Participation, the
Oregon Office of
Energy, the Washington
Department of Ecology,
and regional Tribal
and citizen
representatives.*

Openness and Security

Background

It is the mission of the Hanford Openness Workshops (HOW) to resolve issues impeding the availability of information important to public health, the environment, understanding and decision making at the US Department of Energy's (DOE) Hanford nuclear site in southeastern Washington state. This fact sheet outlines the HOW's discussions on the relationship between openness and security at DOE.

Openness and Security

The year 1999 brought renewed public attention to sensitive national security information at the Department of Energy (DOE). Some in the news media and Congress have suggested that "too much openness" led to foreign capture of nuclear weapons designs. Both the Hanford Openness Workshops and DOE recognize, however, that openness and security go hand-in-hand. As the Secretary of Energy's Openness Advisory Panel has said, openness is about putting higher fences around a narrower range of information, thereby *increasing* security. DOE strengthens its ability to secure sensitive information to the extent it earns public trust through accountability and openness.

As Joseph S. Mahaley, Director of the Department's Office of Security Affairs put it:

Openness provides both a means to assure that the proper sensitive information is protected by classification but at the same time seeks to provide Departmental accountability to the public by not classifying information that does not have a demonstrable connection to national security.¹

Since 1994, the Department of Energy has moved consistently toward narrowing its holdings of classified documents. At the end of 1997, Secretary Federico Peña implemented several recommendations of a "Fundamental Classification Policy Review" sponsored jointly by the Departments of Energy and Defense. Key actions include:

- Moving away from any nuclear-related information being "born classified" and toward a policy that requires justification for information to be classified in the first place.
- Segregating sensitive information from information relating to health, safety and the environment, so that the latter will not be classified.
- Providing for broad reviews of historical documents to speed up their declassification.
- More clearly defining and closely restricting access to information that really is sensitive.

These and other actions followed from President Clinton's Executive Order 12958, issued in April 1995. The President said "An informed citizenry is essential to the democratic process and ...the more the American people know about their government the better they will be governed. Openness in government is essential to accountability."

What Needs To Be Protected?

Most people appear to agree that the following kinds of information are sensitive from a national security standpoint and need to be protected:

- Designs for nuclear weapons and delivery systems for weapons, including details about achieving fission of plutonium or highly enriched uranium in a particular configuration.
- Arrangements to safeguard plutonium and highly enriched uranium from diversion, sabotage and terrorism.
- Location, numbers and other information about how nuclear weapons are deployed (mostly a Department of Defense matter).

In earlier years, information about producing plutonium and highly enriched uranium was regarded as sensitive, together with information about the amounts produced. Most of this information has now been declassified.

Protection of information for other purposes—personnel records, individual medical records, business-sensitive information and export control—is handled under other laws and regulations. As we shall see, however, these complicate the problem of reviewing historical records. The Department needs to segregate these kinds of information in newly-produced documents, in order to maximize future openness and accountability.

Openness and the 1999 Security “Flap”

For the most part, the problems that led to present-day concern about loss of sensitive national security information do not flow from the DOE’s openness initiatives, as discussed above. Rather, these problems appear to result from:

- Fragmentation of responsibility and lack of accountability in the Department, so that reforms, including the openness reforms, were not implemented.
- Failure to define and build the “higher walls” around truly sensitive information.
- Breakdowns in management of electronic versions of information.

Some members of Congress were concerned that blanket declassification of historical documents occasionally led to release of still-sensitive information. DOE was forced to rethink the scope of this activity. In some cases, verification of already-completed declassification reviews was required.

Classification, Security and Openness at Hanford

The main business of the Hanford Site during its production period was plutonium production. Most of its historical records contain information that is no longer regarded as sensitive and can be declassified. Declassification review, however, is labor intensive. It is complicated by the intermixing, in the past, of various kinds of sensitive and protected information (e.g. personal information subject to the Privacy Act). As of June 1999, 2,345,000

pages of Hanford documents have been reviewed for public release. At the present pace, all the historically classified information on site will have been reviewed by the end of Fiscal Year 2003. Hanford's declassification and review of historic records has not been considered a contributing factor to present lapses in security of sensitive information. Nor has the Department slowed Hanford review of documents—although Hanford's highly-regarded reviewers have been diverted to verification activities related to blanket declassification at other Departmental facilities.

Under the more restrictive rules governing classification of newly-generated documents, Hanford produced 1,045 classified documents in 1998 and 913 in the first half of 1999. Most of these relate to security and safeguards for large quantities of plutonium still stored at Hanford.

A Look Ahead

Security and openness are complementary. So, too, are loss of security and secrecy. The same institutional and cultural problems within the Department that many have associated with secrecy—arrogance, lack of accountability, resistance to reform—are cited by the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board as key contributors to loss of sensitive information to a foreign power.² "Often government hides the truth from itself, with results expensive or dangerous, or both," notes columnist George F. Will.³

It appears that DOE's current leadership has maintained its commitment to accountability in the face of charges of "lax security." However, the Congress may enact sweeping organizational change. Those committed to openness must monitor such changes carefully, to make sure they focus appropriately on clarifying and strengthening the walls around truly sensitive information, while enhancing, rather than obscuring, accountability to the public.

The Hanford Openness Workshops are committed to continuation of the movement toward openness, begun by Secretary Watkins' blanket declassification of historic radiation release records from Hanford and accelerated by Secretaries O'Leary and Peña. Workshop participants understand that openness supports, rather than undermines, security. The workshops have focused particularly on public access to information that is rightly available and on accountability.

"A popular government, without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or tragedy or perhaps both."—James Madison

For more information, see the ***Hanford Openness Workshops 1999 Report***, available via the HOW address or electronically at the HOW web site.

¹ Memorandum for Distribution, Washington, D.C., May 26, 1999.

² President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, ***Science At Its Best: Security At Its Worst***, Washington, D.C., June 1999.

³ George F. Will, "Secrecy and Stupidity," ***Newsweek***, October 12 1998, p. 94.